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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 YEREVAN 000095

SIPDIS

G/TIP FOR MEGAN HALL

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TAGS: [PHUM](#) [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [KJUS](#) [KTIP](#) [AM](#)  
SUBJECT: DEPUTY PM OUTLINES BEEFED UP ANTI-TIP EFFORTS  
  
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Classified By: AMB Marie Yovanovitch, reasons 1.4 (b,d).

SUMMARY

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¶1. (C) Deputy Prime Minister Gevorgian evinced detailed knowledge of Armenia's TIP situation in a private lunch with the Ambassador, and outlined a very encouraging program of intensified work on the issue. The government has re-launched criminal cases to investigate the notorious Zakharyants case -- a trafficker who escaped Armenian custody in 2006. He also described stepped up government appropriations and publicity efforts aimed at public awareness, improved services to victims, and efforts to better educate Armenian police and officials on TIP. Following the lunch, Emboffs held constructive TIP-related meetings with Armenian law enforcement agencies, where each agency acknowledged that they are "under more pressure" to work on this issue. All of these developments are consistent with our perception that under Gevorgian's leadership, the GOAM has finally shifted from lip service to serious commitment in the anti-TIP fight. END SUMMARY

NEW LEADERSHIP SPURS BURST OF NEW TIP ACTIVITIES

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¶2. (C) The Ambassador had lunch February 9 with Deputy Prime Minister Armen Gevorgian, who also chairs Armenia's new Ministerial Council to Combat Trafficking in Persons. Gevorgian showed an impressive substantive grasp of the TIP issue, proving well-briefed on the full range of issues discussed in the U.S.-Armenia dialogue on TIP. (NOTE: The ministerial council is supported by a staff-level working group headed by Dziunik Aghajanian, MFA Director of International Organizations. END NOTE)

¶3. (C) On putting an end to official corruption in trafficking, Gevorgian said he had obtained support from President Sargsian in persuading the Prosecutor General to launch new criminal cases into the notorious Anush Zakharyants case. Zakharyants is a convicted trafficker (a citizen of Uzbekistan, though of Armenian heritage) who in 2006 escaped from an Armenian prison, recovered her passport, and fled the country with the help of corrupt officials. We have pressed the GOAM to re-open criminal cases (previously closed without result by prosecutors after cursory investigations) to determine how Zakharyants was released from prison, reobtained her confiscated (expired) passport from other Armenian officials, and successfully crossed the Armenian-Georgian border (three times within a few weeks) using the expired passport. Gevorgian promised that all of this will now be thoroughly re-investigated.

¶4. (C) Gevorgian also assured the Ambassador that the GOAM would effectively spend the money it allocated for anti-TIP

programs in its 2009 national budget, and said he planned to request even higher funding for 2010. Gevorgian said he had tasked the Ministerial Council's inter-agency working group to set up a series of public speaking opportunities for him to raise public awareness of TIP. He also said that he planned to hold high-profile public meetings two or three times a year on the TIP problem, as a means of building public awareness and galvanizing Armenian authorities into making the issue a priority. He stated that if a police chief, for example, knows that he's likely to have to account for his TIP performance to the deputy prime minister on television, he will be more seized of the problem and less likely to sweep incidents under the rug.

15. (C) The Ambassador welcomed Gevorgian's -- and the GOAM's -- increased efforts and attention to trafficking issues over the past six months. She urged that the Council also address the apparent shortcomings of the newly developed National Referral Mechanism (NRM), conveying NGOs' assessments that the NRM as drafted does not adequately provide intermediate and long-term assistance to trafficking victims. Dziunik Aghajanian followed up with the Embassy February 12 to request more details about our NRM concerns. (COMMENT: The Ambassador will shortly send a letter to Gevorgian with our, and NGO concerns. END COMMENT.)

#### CONSTRUCTIVE TIP MEETINGS WITH NSS, POLICE, PG'S OFFICE

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16. (SBU) Following the Ambassador's lunch with Gevorgian, Emboffs held several constructive TIP-related consultations with representatives of Armenian law enforcement agencies -- the National Security Service (NSS), Police, and Prosecutor General's Office -- to obtain information for the 2009 TIP report. All three agencies agreed that a greater priority

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has been given to TIP in the last year, with the five NSS representatives revealing that there was "pressure from above" to do more on this issue. (COMMENT: We interpreted this as a reference to Gevorgian's increased attention and directives on anti-TIP efforts. Before being named deputy prime minister last year, Gevorgian had long served former President Robert Kocharian as his chief of staff, and is reported to have been Kocharian's intermediary with all GOAM agencies, including the security services. So it's quite plausible that Gevorgian merely has to pick up the phone and call the heads of the NSS, Police, or Prosecutor-General to issue such directives. END COMMENT.)

17. (SBU) All three agencies were also clearly aware of Armenia's Tier Two Watch List status, and expressed hope that Armenia's progress during the year would be reflected in it being removed from the Watch List this June. The Prosecutor General's Office stressed to Emboffs that such a development would be highly positive for their anti-TIP efforts, and would provide an extra stimulus to all law enforcement agencies to make even more progress next year. All three agencies were similarly forthright about their shortcomings in combating TIP, agreeing that more training for victim identification would be greatly appreciated. Asked about the new National Referral Mechanism for providing assistance to trafficking victims, which NGOs have complained focuses too much on using the victims for prosecution of TIP cases, both the NSS and PG's office complained that their input had not been reflected in the final product, and that the Police had ramrodded their own version through the approval process so they could be the overseer of the NRM.

#### COMMENT

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18. (C) Gevorgian said all the right things on Armenia's apparent new commitment to combating TIP. The fact that he was not only well-briefed on all of our talking points, but also outwardly committed to taking actions to address USG

concerns, and carrying through on this commitment, suggests the GOAM has turned a corner on this issue. The responsiveness of the law enforcement agencies, and the feeling that they have been empowered to move more aggressively on this issue, is another positive sign. We will need to remain actively engaged to ensure that the GOAM follows through on Gevorgian's commitments and continues to build on the positive steps it has taken over the past few months. Nevertheless, we think we are finally seeing the GOAM back up its words with actions in its anti-TIP fight.

YOVANOVITCH